Peace and Harmony
Philippians 4:1-9
July 23-24, 2011 Pastor Philip Thomas

Introduction: Growing up in a house of four boys, peace and harmony was hard to come by. I am sure I have heard my mom cry out for peace and harmony or peace and quiet within our home more than enough times. We were typical boys. We loved to hit each other, make fun of each other, wrestle with each other, and try to hurt each other. I remember one such occasion when harmony and peace were hard to find in our home. As I have told you before, we used to go to my grandparents when my mom had to work in the summer which was never fun because of the options of either working or watching soap operas. We finally convinced my mom to let us stay home since my brother was old enough to watch over the rest of us. While home, my older brother started playing a video game and was not having success. While struggling, my younger brother mocked and laughed at him from the corner. Slowly his anger was building as he would warn him to stop. Before long my older brother couldn’t take it anymore and in a fit of rage began chasing him around the house. The look in his eyes gave me the impression that he was going to seriously hurt him, so I started chasing him. The three of us ran circles around the house from room to room since every room was connected to the next; however, my younger brother made the mistake of heading up the stairs which was like running down a dead end street. As my older brother turned the corner to head up the stairs, I reached over the railing and grabbed him and proceeded to push him against the wall to try and calm him down. To escape me, he began pushing me away by pressing his forearm against my throat. My response was to punch him in the head. Before long we were pushing each other back and forth from wall to wall until we ended up through the window of our front door. We both stopped immediately probably trying to figure out how we were going to cover this one up. As we stood there stunned and blood coming down my arm, we overheard our youngest brother on the phone with my mom saying, “Mike and Phil broke the front window, and Phil is bleeding.” It wasn’t pretty when my mom had to rush home from work to deal with us. Sadly this seems to be a more accurate picture of the family of Christ than any other. The lack of peace and harmony within the church is frankly quite disheartening. We all long for peace and harmony in our lives. We want to get along with and enjoy being around the people we live with, work with, and go to church with, but sadly while we are to treat one another as brothers and sisters, our relationships look more like those of a dysfunctional family than those of a healthy harmonious family. My heart has been broken for our church, because I feel that harmony and peace have been lacking here. Paul’s comments to two women in Philippians 4 could just as well be directed at us. There was some sort of dispute that was causing disunity and could lead to destruction in the church. It was important enough that Paul called for something to be done about it. He wanted these women to have harmony or literally to be of the same mind. This theme he has mentioned time and time again in his letter to the Philippians. In 1:27 he tells them to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel being of one Spirit and one mind striving for the faith of the Gospel. Instead of fighting they
should have been collectively seeking the spread of the Gospel. In 2:2 he says that they would fulfill his joy if they were of the same mind and united in Spirit and intent on one purpose, that purpose being the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Shouldn’t this be what we are about? How long will we let this lack of harmony keep us from doing what we are called to do? It is my prayer that we as a church and we as pastors and staff (who are definitely not excluded in this) would learn to live in peace and harmony with one another for the sake of the Gospel. In order to do this, I want to look at Philippians 4 and pull out some principles that will help us move to a place of peace and harmony not only in our church but in our work place, in our homes, and in our community as well.

1. Peace and harmony come through being joyful at all times (Philippians 4:4)

   o **Explain:** Paul challenged the two women in Philippi to have harmony in the Lord. He was to be the center and source of their unity. Even if they disagreed on other issues, their common commitment to Jesus Christ should have been the foundation for their unity and agreement. All other differences and disagreements can be overcome if we agree on the fundamental understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were to be of the same frame of mind in Christ which according to chapter 2 meant considering others first and not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Not only was their agreement to be founded in the person of Jesus Christ, as stated in 3:1, their joy was to be founded in the person of Jesus Christ.

   ▪ If we are going to have peace with one another and the peace of Christ, we must rejoice or find joy in the Lord at all times. We often fight, because we didn’t get what we wanted. This is usually at the heart of any quarrel or disagreement that seems to have no theological or doctrinal issue at hand. When we don’t get what we want we become upset, and the reason we become upset is because our joy is centered in that thing that we wanted or in a situation rather than in the Lord. People change, situations change, we change, but the Lord will always stay the same. To rejoice here means to find pleasure in, to delight in, or to be satisfied in. If my satisfaction is in my unchanging Lord, then my joy should never change or leave me. Even in the loss of all, the source of my satisfaction would still exist and be the same.

   o **Illustrate:** I remember going to visit my wife for the day when we were dating and I was just an hour or so away doing an internship. I remember the swing of emotions, because my joy was based on the time spent with her. During the 1-2
hour ride down from Quakertown Pennsylvania to Laurel Maryland I remember the excitement that would build as I got closer. I would have my music jamming, would be drumming the steering wheel, and would be showing great appreciation for inanimate objects that let me know I was closer to seeing my love. But as the day came closer to an end and our time spent together was soon to be over I remember the complete other end of the spectrum. I did not want to leave and was filled with sorrow and pain. The ride back was brutal and all I wanted to do was turn around. Instead of appreciating inanimate objects I showed great disdain for them. This is not the joy Paul is speaking of. This is a temporal experience of happiness that comes and goes with situations. Paul is speaking of a joy that always remains because it is centered on the unchanging Lord Jesus Christ. This is how one can rejoice always, because they are not basing their joy on what someone else does or does not do. Unity will only come between individuals when they find this type of joy in all things and move it away from the situation they are disputing about.

- **Argue:** In 1 Peter 4:12-19, Peter says that we should not be surprised when we faced numerous trials but instead should rejoice, because in suffering for the Lord, we identify with Him. We show that we are one with Him. The joy is not in the suffering but in the identification with Jesus Christ who will one day glorify those who suffered for His name sake. James made a similar statement in James 1:2-4. He said, “consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” In the end that endurance perfects our faith making us complete and lacking nothing. Paul wrote about having such joy in the Lord while He was in chains. His circumstance was not great, but his circumstance brought about the furtherance of the Gospel and caused him to grow in the Lord.

- **Apply:** What has happened to our joy? It seems that many people in the church are the most miserable people in the world. Those who should have the greatest joy seem to lack any at all. We are so caught up in our circumstances and what is going on around us. Like Peter we have removed our focus from Jesus Christ, our joy, and have begun to look at the waves that are crashing all around us. What has happened to our joy pastors? What has happened to the joy of serving the Lord in ministry? What has happened to the joy of seeing lives changed and men and women commit to following Jesus Christ? We don’t have harmony with one another, because we don’t have joy in the Lord. We are to upset with not getting our own way. If we had joy in the Lord we would be a joy to be around. If we were a joy to be around, the harmony people would see in us would be different. Stop focusing on your circumstance and start focusing on Christ. Stop focusing on
the quarrel you have with someone or the disagreement and start focusing on Christ. Francis Chan challenged in his book Crazy Love, “What if we saw everyone as if they were Jesus Christ?” We have reason to rejoice. We have been freed from the bondage of sin and death. We have been adopted as sons of God and made joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We will one day share in His glorification. May the joy of the Lord fill our lives and fill this place.

2. Peace and harmony come through being gentle with all men (Philippians 4:5)

○ Explain: The word “gentle” in our text applies directly to the issue at hand found in the context. It means to be forbearing, considerate, or yielding. In order for these two women to find unity with one another and to experience the peace of Jesus Christ, someone needed to yield. Someone needs to say, “I am going to consider their interests above my own.” Someone has to give up or the quarrels and fights will continue as long as both individuals want what they want and what they each want is different. If no one yields, the cycle of fighting and revenge will continue until all are destroyed. Paul says that we are to be gentle or yielding to all men. Jesus Christ is our example, and He yielded to all men, unbelievers included, so that they could have what they needed most.

- Paul connects the phrase “the Lord is near” to gentleness and to the next verse. It carries two ideas. One, God is near in time. We can forbear and yield to others knowing that Christ is coming soon and we will experience the joys of His righteous kingdom. We also need not be anxious knowing that He will soon return and make all things good. Two, God is near in proximity. We must be gentle, because the gentle Lord and Savior is near us. He knows and sees our responses and interaction with one another. We need not feel anxious knowing that the comforter is close to us and will not be far in our time of need.

○ Illustrate: My brothers and I were never gentle. No one ever wanted to give in and let the other have or let the other take first place. That attitude caused great tension within our home and sucked any hopes of peace out of our home. I remember times where we had joint interest in something, but both of us were so stubborn an unyielding that we would rather see no one win than let the other go ahead of us. For instance, if I wanted to play a game that I owned but my brother wouldn’t get off the system, I would just take my game out of the system, which usually didn’t end well. Or if I wanted to play a game that he owned but he wouldn’t let me, then I wouldn’t let him use my system so neither of us would be
playing. In the end it is really just a lose-lose scenario rather than just sharing and taking turns. It was worse when we would fight so much that my mom would get her own in and say something like, “Well neither of you are allowed to use my TV, so there. Go to your room.” If no one yields or is gentle, no one wins.

- **Argue**: Paul had seen this lack of gentleness. While he was in prison people poured salt in his wounds. Many used his imprisonment as a way to discredit his ministry and try to gain more followers. The used it for selfish gain according to 1:17. In 2:21 Paul goes on to say that these men were seeking their own interests, but he told the Philippians to do nothing out of these motives but instead to put the interests of others above their own. He calls them to practice gentleness so as to create peace and harmony within their church. He says elsewhere that we are to make every effort to live at peace with all men. We hate to give preference in anything. Just let someone try to cut us in line or take the last donut.

- **Apply**: For most of us, being gentle to others is a difficulty. We hate to yield our desires to theirs. We hate to just put up with what they want. Our pride and selfishness quickly kick in. We have been trained from infancy to fight for what we want. This takes a complete changing of the heart and mind and will take work to break out of. Are you fighting with a parent? Yield to them to produce peace and harmony in your home. Instead of fighting with your brother or sister, be the first to let them watch the show they want to watch or use the bathroom first in the morning before school. As long as you continue to fight for what you want, you will find frustration and anger as everyone else continues to do the same. Paul tells you to be gentle to all men. This means your younger brother, your teacher, your mom, your classmate, freshman, your spouse, your co-worker, your boss, and anyone else you might need to put in that list. Imagine the harmony our world would have if just a small percentage of us practiced gentleness with all men. I think to some degree we have forgotten what ministry is all about. Ministry is about people. We have forgotten about the people and think only about ourselves. If they don’t fall in line with what we want, then they need to get out of the way. Christ has called us to love God and to love others. If we fail to do that, we fail to do what he calls the sum of all the commandments. Like these women, we have forgotten the person behind the disagreement. For there to be peace, at least one party has to surrender.

3. **Peace and harmony come through being prayerful in all things**  
   *(Philippians 4:6-7)*
Explain: Quarrels begin between two people who are not getting what they want or who are fighting for what they want. When we are fighting with someone, a lot of times that is the only thing that fills our minds. We think about it in class, before we fall asleep, and in church. That is the very idea of anxiety. The word Paul uses here means to be greatly concerned for something or to have constant concern. Literally it is thought of often. Paul says we are not to be anxious for anything, including a quarrel we may have with someone else. Instead of taking all that time to dwell on that concern, we are to take all things to the Lord in prayer. What if our first response to any situation we are confronted with is to immediately take it to God in prayer rather than complain, gossip, fight, or sway? Prayer seems to be our last resort however.

- The word for prayer here just means to go to God with our concerns. The content of that prayer is our request. We need to be open and honest with God with what we want or desire. The attitude behind that prayer is thanksgiving. We must be thankful for answered prayers in the past and the answer to this prayer no matter what the answer may be. We can be thankful that we can bring our requests to the Lord and He cares enough to listen and concern Himself with our prayers.

- When we take our request to God rather than concern our minds constantly with the situation an inner peace and harmony of knowing that it is in His hands can come upon us. We can be at peace knowing that He will do what is best for all those involved. It also creates peace between you and the one you lack harmony with, because it is moved outside of your concern and outside the power that you may perceive to be in their control. You can know that God is in control. This peace is beyond human comprehension or more literally has greater value than anxiety ever could. Anxiety brings burden on our hearts and minds; prayer releases us of that burden. Through prayer, we free ourselves up to consider or think upon other things, and our hearts will no longer carry the burden of wanting to be in control or to see changes. Instead of fighting, we can let go which creates peace and unity with us and the one we lack harmony with.

Illustrate: I know it happens to my wife and I all the time and I am sure it happens to you. Someone says something that really upsets you and you start thinking about it or concerning yourself with it for a long time, or as Paul would say, you are anxious about it. 3 hours later we will be driving somewhere, and I will say, “That makes me so mad. I can’t believe they said that” to which my wife will say “are you still thinking about that.” then we feel like we have to respond,
like we have to say something, when really we should just take it to the Lord. We take it to the Lord not necessarily that He would change that person but so that He can change us. Lord, change the way I feel about this and allow my heart to be calm in this. When we do this, a peace that people cannot understand comes upon us. People can’t understand how we can just let it go and not say or do something. It doesn’t make sense. I am the kind of person that when I borrow someone else’s stuff. I take better care of it than even my own stuff. I have borrowed movies from Joey and hid them when I left the house just in case someone broke in and stole things, they would not steal his stuff. Now, he can trust me with those things and not concern himself with them. How much more can we trust the God of the universe who is in control of all things? Taking things to him in prayer like this can allow us to breathe a sigh of relief and move on with our day instead of seeing our day ruined because we can’t get a quarrel we have with someone off of our mind.

- **Argue:** When I think about being prayerful in all things, I think about Nehemiah. For many of us prayer becomes a last resort once we have exhausted all of our options. When we have nothing left to do and don’t know where to turn we turn to God, but for Nehemiah, the first place he turned was to God. When he heard about the state of the nation of Israel the first thing he did was pray. He wept and prayed for many days, possibly even months. When he wanted to seek permission from the king, he prayed. When threats came against the people, he prayed. When the people became discouraged, he prayed. He did not become anxious but took all things to the Lord in prayer. We often go to God praying that he will do something to the person we have a quarrel with or that he will change their heart. We need to be willing to allow God to change our heart through prayer and also be willing, with thanksgiving, the hand that concern over to God and trust Him with it no matter what He does with it, even if that means he allows the other person to get what they want and not us. This type of attitude takes faith and trust. It takes trust that God is always seeking our good and will always do what is right. If takes faith that God is in control even when we can’t see it or things don’t quite make sense to us. It is this kind of attitude that is needed when facing the tough questions Pastor Tim has been talking about in Habakkuk. Give God control of your life and watch the great things He does through and in it.

- **Apply:** Is prayer your first reaction or your last resort? When something is happening in the church that you do not like or do not agree with but is not necessarily a doctrinal issue or a sin issue, do you take it to God or do you complain and fight about it? Anxiety solves nothing. In fact the stress in anxiety can be very damaging to our body and soul. When we pray to God, we are taking
the burden of that situation off of our shoulders and laying it at His feet so that He can handle it. This takes trust. It takes enough trust to believe that He will do what is absolutely necessary for both you and everyone else involved. In takes enough trust to believe that He knows what is best for you and the other person even if the end result or the final answer to your request does not come out with you getting your own way and everything you wanted. That does not matter if I trust that God knows what He is doing, far more than I do. Anxiety is riddled with doubt. We stress and concern ourselves with things, because we doubt that God can do what is best and what is good on our behalf. Peace comes through prayer never through anxiety. Worry does not add a single day to our life. Instead of concerning ourselves constantly with the quarrel, we should seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Imagine the peace and harmony that will be when each of us is seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness rather than our own selfish interests.

4. **Peace and harmony come through being mindful of all excellence** (Philippians 4:8-9)

   - **Explain:** What I mean by that is this. We need to set our minds or concern our minds with those things that truly are the best things, the fundamental things. The fights and quarrels we find ourselves in often center around a petty issue. It is usually something that really makes no difference in the great scheme of things or in comparison to the whole is of little significance like the color of the carpet or a song choice. If we concerned ourselves with only the things that were really important we would find ourselves fighting about little things far less and experience peace among the brethren and within our hearts. Paul says that whatever things are excellent and praiseworthy, they should be in our minds. The good and commendable things are what are important. If it does not fall into these categories, then just let it go.

   - “True” = we must think on those things that are true or trustworthy or related to facts. All truth is found in God who cannot tell a lie (Titus 1:2), whose word is truth (John 17:17), and who is the truth (John 14:6). Focus on the eternal unchanging truths, not the temporal truths or personal disputes or petty differences. This means focusing on what we know to be true instead of dwelling on perceptions or rumors.

   - “Noble” = we must think on those things that are worthy of respect or honor not petty issues. We should focus on things like the cross, Christ,
and the Gospel not music, clothing, or church structure. We should dwell on the positive things, not the negative things all the time.

- “Right” = we must focus on the things that are morally or ethically right. This is not just what we think is right, but what is right according to God’s standard. I may think that skinny jeans are not right on any man, but can I make that God’s doctrine? I wish. Focus on upholding what is honoring to God not what will be honoring to you.

- “Pure” = we need to focus on the things that are harmless, without sin, or have no intent of doing wrong. In essence, these are the thing we need to fight for. If someone is doing something that is harmless, then you should not be fighting against them. We need to be more concerned with keeping ourselves from sin. We fight over more things that have nothing to do with sin than we fight to rid our lives of sin.

- “Lovely” = we need to be mindful of the acceptable or pleasing things. Again, these are those things that are acceptable or pleasing to God not us. It is pleasing to God that we work together for the sake of the Gospel. It is not pleasing to Him that we can’t stop quarreling with one another long enough to accomplish any ministry. If we focus each day on pleasing God, we will find ourselves being more humble and sacrificial with others we disagree with.

- “Admirable” = we need to be mindful of those things that are worthy of praise or are thought of in high regard by both believer and unbeliever. People admire gentleness, humility, forgiveness, and sacrifice. What they can’t admire is stubbornness, pride, lack of mercy, and selfishness.

**Apply:** We are so quick to see the flaws and failures in people. We are so quick to pick out the faults in people. What if we focused on the excellent things? What if we focused on Christ in that person? I must admit that I am the worst. I am a critic. I critique everything from commercials to people. We sit back and nit-pick all these petty little things instead having a heart-felt passion for people. Instead of seeing the hurt that may be causing them to act a certain way or think a certain way and seeking to help them grow, we write them off and avoid them. We need a change of focus. We need a change of perspective. We need a mind that loves people as much as it loves self. If we are honest, we love ourselves a whole lot more than we really ought to, yet our love for other people is very shallow usually only dependent on the love that they show to us going right back to a love for self.
Fill your mind with these things and your focus will be diverted from the petty differences that seem to cause fights among us. If more of us concerned ourselves with the excellent and commendable things, we would have less time worrying about the nonsense things. Just watch people like Paul who are focused on greater things. They don’t get caught up in everyday nonsense. They are not worrying about drums on the stage or ties left in the closet. They are worrying about the glory of the Lord and seeing Him magnified. They are worried about the growth of the church and the spreading of the Gospel. They are worried about seeing people be discipled and God’s Word being proclaimed. We spend too much time worrying and dwelling on these things that are of no great concern. Peace can come between you and me when our minds go to something greater than our minor differences and preferences. I am tired of focusing on all the negative things that exist around us. I want to focus on what is excellent and build upon that. I want to strive for those things and stop giving so much attention to the failures and the weaknesses.

**Conclusion:** We all want harmony in our lives. We want an inner peace free from anxiety and stress. We want to be united and in harmony with our parents, our friends, our siblings, or our teachers. No one wants a chaotic life void of peace. If we are going to have that peace and experience a joy that exists in any situation, we must begin to practice these things. We must be joyous at all times. The source of our satisfaction and joy must move from the situation to the person of Jesus Christ. We must be gentle to all men. We need to be willing to yield to other men when the issue is of no great importance. We must pray in all things rather than burden ourselves with anxiety trying to take control and get our way. Finally, we must set our minds on the things that really matter. Understand what is worth fighting for in this life and what is not. We spend too much time, have too much heartache, and throw away too much peace fighting for petty little things. Peace and harmony is more important than getting to watch what you wanted to watch or making sure you get the last word in. If you are struggling to find harmony, perhaps with your life or with another person, what do you need to do in order to allow the peace of God to come into your life?